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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00 INR-07

NSAE-00 DODE-00 L-03 ACDA-07 SAJ-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00

EUR-12 EB-07 OES-06 IO-13 MC-02 /096 W
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R 241229Z NOV 76
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9689

S E C R E T NEW DELHI 17079

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IN, PK
SUBJECT: INDIAN COMMENTS ON PAK NUCLEAR/A-7 ISSUES TO DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY DUBS

1. IN LUNCHEON CONVERSATION WITH MEA JOINT SECRETARIES FOR POLICY PLANNING (DAMODARAN)/EAST EUROPE, SOVIET (PURUSHOTTAM), AND CHINA (JHA), INDIANS ALL AGREED IN TELLING VISITING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY DUBS THAT INDIANS WERE NOT RPT NOT CONCERNED OVER PROSPECT OF PAK NUCLEAR CAPABILITY BUT PRIMARILY OVER SHORT-TERM THREAT OF INCREASED CONVENTIONAL CAPABILITY. PAKISTAN ACQUISITION OF ATTACK AIRCRAFT SUCH AS A-7 WOULD "FORCE" GOI TO EXPEND LARGE BUDGETARY RESOURCES TO PROCURE SIMILAR AIRCRAFT, DAMODARAN SAID, AND TURN INDIAN FINANCIAL PLANNING "TOPSY-TURVY". ASKED EXPLICITYLY WHETHER THEY MEANT GOI WOULD NOT ITSELF PROCURE SIMILAR ADVANCED AIRCRAFT FROM WESTERN OR SOVIET SOURCES IF PAKS DID NOT BUY A-7, DAMODARAN CATEGORICALLY SAID THAT WAS CORRECT, INDIA WOULD NOT NEED TO DO SO.

2. FURTHER ELABORATING REASONS FOR DISCOUNTING PAK NUCLEAR CAPABILITY, DAMODARAN AND PURUSHOTTAM ARGUED (A) PAKS WOULD ULTIMATELY GO NUCLEAR ANYWAY AND ANY BARGAINING OF AIRCRAFT FOR REPROCESSING PLANT WAS SIMPLY BUYING LIMITED AMOUNT OF TIME, (B) PAKS WOULD BE EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO USE NUCLEAR WEAPONS ON INDIAN POPULATION, THUS INDISCRIMINATELY KILLING
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HINDUS AND MUSLIMS, AND (C) PAKISTAN WAS FAR MORE VULNERABLE

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TO NUCLEAR ATTACK THAN INDIA BECAUSE OF ITS SMALLER SIZE AND FEWER POPULATION CENTERS. PURUSHOTTAM SUGGESTED THAT VULNERABILITY OF A-7S TO INTERDICTION BY HIGH-PERFORMANCE FIGHTERS WOULD SIMPLY PROVIDE INCENTIVE FOR GOP TO SEEK NEW FIGHTER AIRCRAFT TO PROVIDE COVER FOR A-7S AND THUS INITIATE YET ANOTHER ROUND OF ESCALATION IN WEAPONRY.

3. COMMENT: THIS IS FIRST TIME WE HAVE HEARD RESPONSIBLE GOI OFFICIALS THIS FORTHRIGHT ON SUBJECT OF INDIANS PUTTING OFF PURCHASE OF ATTACK BOMBER IF PAKS DO NOT PROCURE A-7S. THE LEVEL OF ASSURANCE IS NOT SUFFICIENTLY HIGH TO BE DEFINITIVE BUT INDICATIVE. DURING AN INFORMAL CONVERSATION WITH THE CHARGE ON NOVEMBER 23, ACTING FOREIGN SECRETARY VELLODI EXPRESSED A "PERSONAL" VIEW WHICH DISCOUNTED PAK NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES ALONG MUCH THE SAME LINES AS DAMODARAN AND PURUSHOTTAM. HE SAID HE COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF PAKISTAN ACTUALLY EMPLOYING NUCLEAR WEAPONS AGAINST INDIA AND WAS THEREFORE NOT CONCERNED WITH THIS PROSPECT. HE ADMITTED THE POSSIBILITY THAT PAKISTAN MIGHT AT SOME POINT EXPLODE A NUCLEAR DEVICE BUT IF SO ITS PURPOSE WOULD BE FOR PRESTIGE, NOT MILITARY STRENGTH.
SCHNEIDER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, NUCLEAR WEAPONS, MILITARY CAPABILITIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 NOV 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NEWDE17079
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS,CONFIDENTIAL 112206,25X6, FMACHAK
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D760438-0716
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t197611101/ddrdxaab.tel
Line Count: 83
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 NOV 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 NOV 2003 by GarlanWA>; APPROVED <02 NOV 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

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US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> gwr 20010604
Subject: INDIAN COMMENTS ON PAK NUCLEAR/A-7 ISSUES TO DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY DUBS
TAGS: PFOR, IN, PK, (DUBS, ADOLPH)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006